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AFGHANISTAN

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Afghanistan has a nomadic pastoral history that is thousands of years old. Pastoralists and their way of life cannot be understood without an awareness of their long pastoral history. The national sport of buzkashi, shown here, celebrates Afghanistan's rich nomadic heritage.



Years of conflict and drought decimated Afghanistan's livestock. The impact on the country's nomadic pastoralists (kuchi) was especially severe. USAID has been providing animal health services and, through a new Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program (GL-CRSP), will provide further assistance to pastoralists and rangeland-livestock development.

ASSISTING PASTORALISTS

Livestock production is an important aspect of Afghanistan's economy. In the 1970s, prior to the beginning of armed conflict, livestock and livestock products contributed 16% and 10%, respectively to Afghanistan's GDP. Livestock products made up 14% of total exports with carpets accounting for a further 9%. Afghan pastoralists, known as *kuchi*, and with an estimated population of about 2.5 million, raised 80% of the sheep population. As such, the *kuchi* were a vital component of the country's agriculture economy. Years of conflict and drought severely affected the *kuchi*. Their traditional migration routes were disrupted, access to grazinglands was restricted, and many of their livestock were lost. The *kuchi* saw their livelihoods greatly eroded, and even the most vulnerable have received little support to-date from the Government or the international community.

USAID recently organized a three-day Pastoralist Conference that brought together Afghan and international pastoral development specialists, government officials, *kuchi* representatives, and members of the *Kuchi* Shura. Hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food and the Ministry of Frontiers and Tribal Affairs, the purpose of the conference was to discuss issues related to pastoral development and range management and to develop a broad-based pastoralist support strategy. The first day of the Conference focused on pasture user's rights and land conflict resolution on the pastures. The second day focused on technical aspects of rangeland management, livestock production, animal health, and marketing of livestock and livestock products. The final day of the Conference was spent summarizing the conclusions and initiating discussion on the preparation of an action plan for supporting pastoral development.

The Conference identified the need to address land tenure issues as insecurity over pasture access currently does not provide incentives to manage rangelands for optimal use. With over 45% of Afghanistan classified as rangeland, resolving pastoral conflicts is critical to pastoral development as well as for sustaining vital watershed management aspects of the rangelands. This will require clarifying patterns of use and organizing local committees of users to set rules and enable them to begin to better manage natural resources. Despite their extent and importance, there is no comprehensive assessment of the current status of Afghanistan's rangelands. Obtaining this information is critical for future pastoral development. Increased attention to veterinary services for *kuchi* and creating improved market linkages for livestock and livestock products are also needed.

The Pastoralist Conference reached a consensus on the main issues affecting *kuchi* and successfully served to raise the profile of pastoral development in Afghanistan. The Conference also galvanized interested parties to take action and to begin initiating pilot programs.

The recently completed Master Plan for Agriculture, gives priority to livestock development with specific attention devoted to improving extensive livestock production on the rangelands and improving the lives of *kuchi*. USAID is committed to assisting Afghan livestock producers in the future. USAID will give increased emphasis to animal health services and, through a new Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program (GL-CRSP), introduce new technologies in rangeland management, pastoral development and drought mitigation that will enable *kuchis* to strengthen their pastoral way of life.

U.S. Agency for International Development

On behalf of the American people, the U.S. government has provided humanitarian assistance and economic development to those in need around the world since the Marshall Plan in the 1940s.